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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: UNDP PLAYS UP ITS SPECIAL ROLE IN TURKMENISTAN

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: In an introductory meeting with Charge on January 29, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative, Richard Young, and Deputy Resident Representative, Inita Paulovica, outlined current UNDP programs and discussed the United Nations' "strong role" in Turkmenistan, which stems from the 1995 UN special resolution recognizing Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality. An official request to launch local governance programs was attributed to direct advocacy by a high-level UNDP visitor with President Berdimuhamedov. Human rights programming began with capacity building to report on international treaty obligations, and UNDP is now considering establishing human rights resource centers in each province. Recognizing "immense changes" since President Berdimuhamedov's election, Young acknowledged that some things still haven't changed. The UN's approach is to engage patiently and constructively, while waiting for eventual changes. END SUMMARY.

HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY KEY TO OPENING DOORS ON LOCAL GOVERNANCE

13. (SBU) In an introductory meeting with Charge on January 29, UNDP Resident Representative Richard Young said that UNDP had tried to start working on local self-governance for 18 months before UNDP Assistant Administrator-Regional Director for Europe and CIS, Cory Udovicky, raised the issue with President erdimuhamedov in May 12007. Following the meeting UNDP received an official request for cooperation and began working with Turkmenistan's Parliament in September 2007. UNDP has been "very pleased" with the support it has received and has used the positive relationship to open new doors with the Parliament.

14. (SBU) Deputy Resident Representative, Inita Paulovica, serves as focal point for UNDP's parliamentary work, which is coordinated by Deputy Parliamentary Speaker, Kasymguly Babayev. Due to the Parliament's limited previous cooperation with international organizations, UNDP began with a very simple approach. During a study tour to Latvia, UNDP highlighted the importance of budgets. Upon their return, UNDP opened bank accounts for local councils (Gengeshe) and provided office equipment and computers for participating pilot local governments. A more recent focus on public administration resulted in its plan to perform a functional audit of the roles and responsibilities of government ministries, including how they work with each other. Next, UNDP hopes to institutionalize trainings for local government officials in the new Civil Service Academy, and intends to develop a training plan after the local council (Gengeshe) elections in summer 2009.

THREE PROJECTS THAT BUILD DEMOCRACY IN TURKMENISTAN

15. (SBU) In addition to the local self governance activities, UNDP currently implements a human rights project with European Union funding that builds Turkmenistan's capacity to report on its obligations under international treaties. Most recently, Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR) Director, Shirin Ahmedova, went to Geneva as part of the Universal Periodic Review process. UNDP now plans to expand into human rights education and public awareness. They would like to introduce human rights-related materials into the university curriculum and establish "human rights resource centers" that would provide legal advice for citizens in each province. It plans a feasibility study to determine whether these centers would function better as a branch of the IDHR or under local government structures (hakimliks). (NOTE: The IDHR does not currently have a presence in any provinces, so working through it would raise questions of sustainability. END NOTE) The third main area promoting democracy is electoral assistance.

NEUTRALITY DECLARATION KEY TO UNDP'S "STRONG ROLE"

16. (SBU) Young attributed UNDP's "strong role" in Turkmenistan to the 1995 UN special resolution recognizing the country's permanent neutrality. He believed there had been "immense changes" since President Berdimuhamedov's election, but acknowledged that some things still haven't changed. Young said the UN's approach was to engage patiently and constructively, while waiting for eventual changes to take place.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Post agrees that the UN has a special role in Turkmenistan. That it receives formal requests for cooperation from

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the Government in a wide range of areas is but one tangible sign. Its success in using high-level visitors to break through programmatic obstacles is also noteworthy. Post will continue to look for opportunities to work with the UN in areas of mutual interest when it has been identified as the preferred partner by the Government of Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.

17.
MILES